



Spring 2016

# Can You Dig It?

Welcome to our first edition of *"Can You Dig It"* for 2016.

Before we begin, I want to thank your wonderful Horticulture Committee – we have been doing this now since 2009...and hopefully we can continue our mission— informing and entertaining you, providing new information and sharing our passion for all things Horticulture, and so much more.

We would also like to welcome to our writing group Kim Eckert...both a new member of TCGC and a new member of our Committee. Kim has jumped right in and written an article for this issue on *How We Can Use Native Plants In Our Gardens*.

In addition to the Newsletter, we will be having four workshops sponsored by the Horticulture Committee...see page 16 in your yearbook for details. We hope you will be able to join in our fun and learn a bit along the way.

*Trish Reynolds*, editor

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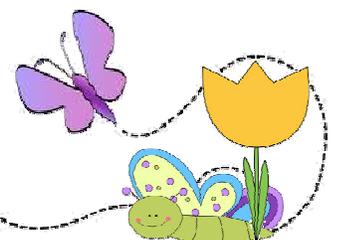
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## Cultivating the Black Swallowtail Butterfly

\* Christie Hamilton

I was thinking of the varied pleasures a garden brings to the gardener. We may lay out a garden "plan" ...flowers, vegetables, herbs. As blooms arrive, I consider the joys of welcoming the hummingbirds, and the butterflies. Hummingbird culture, I have not yet figured, but a **butterfly crop....GOT IT!**



Black Swallowtail Butterfly  
Female



Black Swallowtail Butterfly  
Male

I suggest that somewhere in your sunny garden, you plant one row (or TEN!) of parsley, dill, or fennel. Many of you know that the small black (and later yellow and green stripe) caterpillars chewing on these plants will grace your July garden with beautiful Black Swallowtail Butterflies...all part of the MIRACLE OF METAMORPHOSIS! This is the notice to NOT be annoyed at the appearance of these ragged plants. (Planting MORE next year, may reduce damage).

Henceforth, you may think of these beautiful butterflies as this years "Lepidoptera crop" ...the fluttery blooms of your horticultural effort.



Appearance of black swallowtail butterfly caterpillar

## Who's Living in Your Backyard?

\*Jane Anderson

Our gardens are all a'twitter this time of year as birds begin to plan families and build nests. Part of the joy of gardening is having a first hand view of all this activity. Here are some guidelines for identifying a few common birds making a home in our gardens on the Eastern Shore.

In a natural setting **Eastern Bluebirds** nest in cavities in open areas near woodlands, meadows and orchards. Much of this habitat has been lost over time and bluebird boxes have greatly helped to preserve the population. Their medium sized nests are loosely built of grass and plant materials. The interior of the nests often include finer, softer grasses. Bluebird eggs are usually 3-7 in number and are pale blue in color. The babies fledge in about 21 days.



Eastern Bluebird



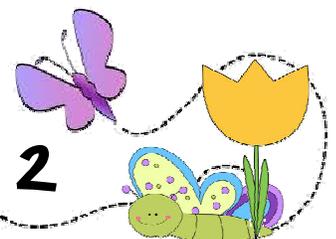
House or English Sparrows

Sworn enemy of the Bluebirds, the **House or English Sparrows** are opportunists. They will nest in cultivated areas and around buildings. They will take over Bluebird nests and kill the Bluebird babies to make room for their own. The House Sparrow nests are rather dome shaped and are made of straw, stems, paper, trash, and bits of cloth or string.

House Sparrow eggs are usually white but may be slightly bluish, marked with darker spots.

**Note:** If you are trying to eliminate House Sparrows be sure to identify them with your bird book. Other types of sparrows are beneficial and do not have the marauding habits of House Sparrows.

**Carolina Wren...** These natural cavity nesters have adapted to nest boxes, bird bottles, and other human altered surrounding. We often find their little nests tucked into a forgotten hat or stashed in some object in an open shed. Wren nests typically have a nice domed shape made of plant materials and lined with fine grass, hair and feathers. Their



small eggs are white with speckles of reddish or mauve colors surrounding the large end of the egg. The babies fledge in only 12-14 days.

**Northern Mockingbird...**Mockingbirds love open woodland with bushes and scattered trees as well as plantings around buildings. Their medium sized nests are loose clumps of dead twigs, leaves, rags and grasses, lined with finer grasses. Eggs are usually pale blue or green with reddish blotches toward the large end of the egg.

**Carolina & Black Capped Chickadees...**These little birds like forested areas, preferring hardwood over conifers. They like cavities such as woodpecker holes or other natural openings but will readily use manmade boxes. Chickadee nests are small, cozy and plush using moss, plant fiber, hair and feathers. Their eggs are very small and white with fine specks of darker colors.



**Tufted Titmouse...**The nests of the Titmouse are small and soft, made with moss, fur, and fine grasses or plant materials. Their eggs are tiny white eggs with rosy to gray speckles and have very little gloss to the shell.

**House Finches...**These finches have visited most of us with their nests in the strangest places. They choose light fixtures, porch posts, fan vents, potted plants or any niche near



buildings and cultivated areas. Their nests are built only by the female out of grasses, leaves and rootlets. Finer materials such as thread, wool, or feathers line the nest for their babes. Finches lay 4-5 eggs, pale blue in color with fine black specks.

**Robin...**Robins' nests are usually found in the crotch of trees or

bushes. Their sturdy medium sized nests are grass and twigs cemented with mud and lined with fine soft grass. Robins' eggs are medium in size and are, of course, "robins' egg blue."

Enjoy our feathered residents who bring life, song and color to our gardens. For more information take a look at: [nestwatch.org](http://nestwatch.org) or [sialis.org](http://sialis.org) on line.



Below you will see egg size compared to a U.S. quarter... pretty small, eh?



## Bee-Safe Gardening Tips

\* Trish Reynolds/Friends of the Earth/District I Annual Meeting Slides

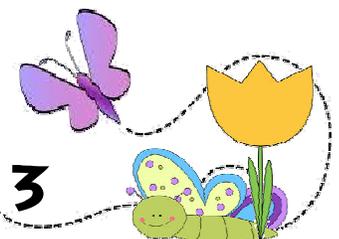


There has been much written lately about the plight of our pollinators...the butterflies, particularly the Monarchs, the bees and bee hive collapse, the lack of food for the birds, bees and pollinators.

New words have been introduced into our vocabulary such as Neonicotinoids or more commonly, "Neonics" – the whole concept of climate change - and so much more. It makes us wonder what we can do in our gardens to help, even in the smallest of ways.

Here are a few tips that were brought up at the recent FGCMD District I Annual Meeting:

- ◆ Grow Bee-Safe – Plant bee and butterfly-friendly plants using only organic starts or untreated seeds in organic potting soil for your home vegetable and flower gardens to help provide safe food and habitat for bees. This could include asters, black-eyed Susans, goldenrod, Joe-Pye Weed, lupine, coneflowers, sunflowers, sage, to name just a few.
- ◆ Practice Bee and Butterfly Safe Pest Control – Avoid the use of systemic bee and butterfly toxic pesticides in your garden and use alternative approaches such as providing habitat to attract beneficial insects that prey on pest insects in your garden. If pest pressure is too high, use insecticidal soaps or oils and other eco-friendly pest control products.
- ◆ Do not buy products that contain Neonicotinoids. These products were developed over the last 20 years by such companies as Bayer and Shell to control a variety of pests. They are systemic pesticides that are chemically related to nicotine and are found in a variety of off-the-shelf plant treatments such as:



- ◆ Bayer Complete insect Control
- ◆ Ortho Flower Fruit and Vegetable Insect Killer
- ◆ Bayer Rose & Flower Insect Killer

If you have these products at home, dispose of them properly. Take action and learn more by going to [www.BeeAction.org](http://www.BeeAction.org).



## How Can We Use Native Plants in Our Gardens?

### \* Kim Eckert

Over the last several years, we have all learned that there are many benefits to including native plants in our gardens. These plants are well adapted to our climate and its many challenges. In addition, they are also resistant to several common pests and diseases. For most gardeners, the overriding issue with their use is how can we incorporate them into our gardens and create beautiful landscapes.

There are three steps everyone should consider when designing gardens with native plants.

- ◆ How do we define native plants?
- ◆ What cultural conditions exist at the site?
- ◆ Which native plants could thrive at the garden site?

In the purest sense, a plant native to Maryland must be a species that existed here when the European settlers arrived. This definition has proven to be very limiting to garden designers and actually intimidating to homeowners. In addition, plant material meeting this definition is often difficult to locate and quite expensive. As a result, the current trend is to include cultivars of the native species. This more relaxed definition allows us to broaden our plant palette and make it easier to design truly spectacular gardens. In addition, most municipalities requiring native plants for buffer management will allow the more relaxed definition, making it easier for us to meet their requirements.

Now that we have expanded our palette through the use of a more relaxed and accepted definition of native plants, it's time to decide what type of plants are well suited to the garden site. To do this, we need to identify the cultural conditions.

- ◆ Light: Full sun, part sun or shade
- ◆ Soil: Sandy, loam or clay
- ◆ Moisture: Dry, average or wet

- ◆ Ph: Acidic or alkaline
- ◆ Topography: Flat, gentle slope or steep

Once the cultural conditions have been determined, you can create a list of native plants that should thrive in that setting. Creating the list of plants is often the most exciting step. There are two publications that are immensely helpful. In 1998, I coauthored one of these booklets with three other Master Gardeners, *Native Plants of Maryland: What, When and Where*. It was written as a guide homeowners could use to help them with reforestation required plantings in Anne Arundel County. The native plants in this booklet are focused on the Coastal Plain region of Maryland. It can be accessed on line at The University of Maryland HGIC, publications, HG120 or: [http://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/\\_images/programs/hgic/Publications/HG120\\_Native\\_Plants%20of\\_MD.pdf](http://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/_images/programs/hgic/Publications/HG120_Native_Plants%20of_MD.pdf)

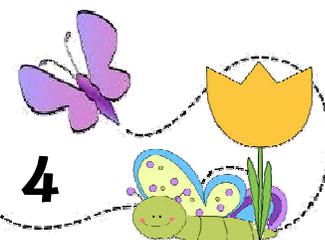
The other booklet is *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping*. It is published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and requests for copies can be sent to their Chesapeake Bay Field Office at 177 Admiral Cochrane Drive, Annapolis, Md., 21401. In addition to listing all plants considered native to Maryland, both booklets have sections in the final pages where plants for specific cultural conditions are listed.

Once you have created your list of native plants suitable for the garden site, you can begin to explore all of the cultivars related to a specific species. For example, *Echinacea purpurea* is our native pink coneflower. An outstanding cultivar is *Magnus* and there are many others: *Kim's*



*Knee High, POW WOW White, and Prairie Splendor* to name a few. They vary in height and color but all are derived from our native species. The same is true for many other

species. Whether you are choosing a tree, shrub, perennial, vine or groundcover, many choices are available. Now the question becomes, with all of these gorgeous cultivar choices of our native species, where will you create your new native bed?



## Clivia - the Queen of Africa

\*Chloe Pitard

It may be the best house plant around. *Clivia minata* is the Latin. Its dark green, glossy strap-like leaves are attractive all year. It is happy with infrequent watering and with the low light levels in a house. If all it ever did was sit there, it would be a nice addition to any indoor garden. You can take it outside in the summer and let it sit in the shade under a tree, and it is happy there until frost.

So far that is very nice, but then it blooms, and it is spectacular. It has huge umbels of trumpet shaped flowers in red, yellow or even salmon. The older the plant, the more flowers you have. They are in bloom now, in March and April, with flowers that will last for a month or more. (See the photos attached to this article). When it blooms you want to have a party to show off.



Many *Clivia* owners complain that their plant won't bloom. You have to treat it like its environment in South Africa.

When you bring it inside in the fall you must put it in a place where the temperature is consistently colder than we humans find comfortable. It wants to winter somewhere between 40° and 50°. An unheated room or your garage are both fine as long as it does not actually get to freezing.

During that time you do not need to water it. Don't worry, it will be fine. There are many plants that need a cold, dry rest period, and *Clivia* is one of them. The rest of the year you should give it regular water and fertilizer like any other houseplant. It likes to be a little pot bound and it does not want to be over-watered. But, **THE WINTER MUST BE COLD!**



Then sometime in mid-February to early March you can bring it into a warmer place where you can see it. Give it a drink and a little liquid fertilizer and watch the blooms emerge. Then it is glorious!

## FROM THE POTTING SHED

\* Sherry Burke

As spring arrives in teasing bursts, gardeners are longing for some blooms to cut for indoor vases. To make this happen a little earlier, think of forcing branches to bloom indoors. The act of forcing branches is little more than gathering bare sticks outdoors, taking care not to destroy the natural shape of the plant. Place them in a container of water, and they should be in bloom several days after you bring them indoors. It is a beautiful process that quietly reminds us of the unspoken promise of the spring to come.

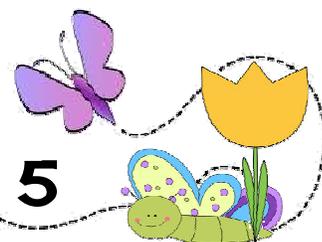
Forcing branches is a simple technique that may be the easiest trick in the realm of gardening. The flower and leaf buds on woody plants (trees and shrubs) are formed during the autumn. These buds need at least six weeks of cold weather before their dormancy can be successfully broken by forcing indoors. In Maryland, the frosty weather begins in November. This means you may start cutting branches for indoor forcing around the end of January and continue as long as you have branches outside that have not yet bloomed.



One of the most popular shrubs for forcing is the forsythia. A few branches in a vase of water will add spring charm and color to a winter room. Other unbeatable forcers are witch hazel, pussy willow, quince, cherry and crabapple, bittersweet, redbud, staghorn sumac, weeping willow and *Spirea*. Also, don't forget to try forcing some *Pieris* which will be thrilled to be out of the cold and

will reward you with masses of flowers. Ordinary "yard trees" also have interesting branches to force, especially maple and birch trees. If you are unsure, try cutting some branches to see what will happen!

Once you have cut the branches and returned to the house, fill a sink or tub with tepid water. Give the branches a two-hour soak. This will moisten and loosen bud scales. After the bath, fill vases with room temperature water, trim an inch



off of the branches, and arrange them in containers. Forcing branches is your opportunity to see how a leaf unlocks itself from wood and how a sweet flower unfurls. What a visual feast to enjoy while spring takes its time outdoors.



(Note: Some information taken from The New Southern Living Garden Book, Month-By-Month Gardening in the South, and Smith & Hawken Forcing, Etc.)

## You Too Can Utube

\* **Bobbie Brittingham**

It is amazing how the picture book has been replaced by the mighty Utube. I have found the most unbelievable things posted on this sight. Anything and everything is there no matter what ... some I really don't want to see and more I wish I hadn't seen.

But then along comes something that is of real value and can really be useful. I have seen videos of many flower designing gurus, and some designs have been plain, plain, plain or so over the top that I quickly change to another or just turn it off. The one that caught my attention was quite clever and looked easy enough. Somehow they usually do make it look easy. It only takes thirty or so seconds to watch it after the outtakes and editing have occurred but in reality might take a wee bit longer.

I watched one for a centerpiece using a cabbage with the center cut out and filled with flowers. Lovely, so I decided to try it and here it lies the truth ...

Gather or buy the materials to use...

some from my garden and some from the grocery store. Cut and condition. I tried hellebores, knowing them particularly



sensitive to cutting and unpredictable at best. I cut them early in the morning and immediately stuck them in a bucket of room temperature water with food. This time it seemed to work - for how long is still up for debate:

Alstroemeria, Mum, Hypericum berry, Curly Willow, Daffodil, Tulip, Hellebores, Savoy Cabbage (regular, even red would do), glass jar, rubber bands.

Cut a hole in center of cabbage, large enough to accommodate a glass jar. Cut from both ends of the cabbage. I found this a lot harder than it looked and took a little time, BUT not hard to do. Just the first time is always harder, as in most things. Using a spoon, scoop out the center so the jar will fit snugly in. Push down as far as it will go to cover the glass and fill with water. I do not use oasis for tulips and daffodils because it clogs the stem and they cannot get enough water.



Gather a few like flowers in small bunches and secure with a rubber band. Thoughtfully place in the jar to create a pleasing grouping. You may have to wedge the cabbage on a

plate to transport and display.

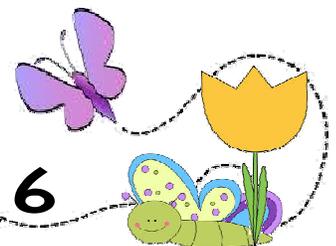
Check all sides of design if it is to be in the middle of a table. Make sure that it does not have any noticeable open holes. A few hanging or reaching flowers, berries or leaves can lighten the feel of the design if it becomes too bunched and heavy looking. I added some newly leafed out slender



branches of curly willow to give it some lightness. The edge of the glass jar was showing so I rearranged a few more leaves of kale to hide it and liked the effect of the two different color green leaves in the design.

I must say I liked the idea and might try again now that I have a little experience and would maybe choose a larger cabbage or smaller material.

All in all I enjoyed trying something from Utube that looked so EASY and, in retrospect, was not that hard. I hope you might give it a whirl too.



## Edible Flowers

### \* Mary Holston

When thinking of edible flowers the first memory that I have is of my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday in Silver Spring, Maryland. We had the most beautiful white and purple striped violets as well as the dark purple ones growing in our neighbor's back yard. My grandmother was especially fond of violets and loved for me to pick her a bouquet of them whenever they were in bloom. Our neighbor was delighted as he thought they were an ugly weed!

The day of my birthday I was surprised by the most beautiful angel food cake iced with a lemon frosting and candied violets that my grandmother had made to decorate the cake. I was so impressed and thrilled with that cake. And, as you can see, I have never forgotten her "magic" with the violets on my cake.



Garnishing food with edible flowers fell out of vogue in the fifties, but is once again the new rage in haute cuisine. Flower cookery has been traced back to Roman times, and to the Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Indian cultures. Edible flowers were especially popular during the Victorian era when Queen Victoria reigned.

Today, many restaurant chefs and innovative home cooks garnish their entrees with flower blossoms for a touch of elegance. The secret to success when using edible flowers is to keep the dish simple and don't add too many other flavors that will over power the delicate taste of the flower.

It is very important to remember that not every flower is edible. Eat flowers only when you are positive they are edible. If uncertain, consult a good reference book on edible flowers or go to the North Carolina State University A&T State University Cooperative Extension service website and check their comprehensive table of Edible Flowers. It shows an image of the flower, the flavor, color, blooming season, form and some useful comments for the use of the particular flower.

Wash all flowers thoroughly before you eat them. Introduce flowers into your diet in small quantities, one species at a time. Too much of a good thing may cause problems for your digestive system. Remove pistils and stamens from the flowers before eating. Separate the flower petals from the rest of the flower just prior to use to keep wilting to a minimum. Eat only the flower petals for most flowers except pansies, violas, and Johnny-jump-ups (in which they add flavor).

If you have allergies, introduce edible flowers gradually, as they may aggravate some allergies.

Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries or garden centers. Often these flowers have been treated with pesticides not labeled for food crops.

Do not eat flowers picked from the side of the road. Once again, possible herbicide use eliminates these flowers as a possibility for use.

Just because the flowers are served with food served at a restaurant does not mean they are edible. Know your edible flowers – as some chefs do not. It's easy and very attractive to use flowers for garnish on plates or for decoration, but avoid using non-edible flowers this way. Many people believe that anything on the plate can be eaten. They may not know if the flower is edible or not and may be afraid to ask.

The following are some of the flowers commonly available that you may want to try in your foods:

**Tuberous Begonias** – The leaves, flowers, and stems are edible. Begonia blossoms have a citrus-sour taste. The petals are used in salads and as a garnish. Stems, also, can be used in place of rhubarb.

**Calendula** – Also called **Marigolds** – A wonderful edible flower. Flavors range from spicy to bitter, tangy to peppery. Their sharp taste resembles saffron and are sometimes referred to as Poor Man's Saffron. Sprinkle them on soups, pasta or rice dishes, herb butters, and salads. Petals add a yellow tint to soups, spreads and scrambled eggs. Remember, only the petals are edible.

**Carnations** – Can be steeped in wine, candy, or used as cake decorations. To use the surprisingly sweet petals in desserts, cut them away from the bitter white base of the flower. Dianthus, the miniature member of the carnation family have a light clove-like or nutmeg scent. Petals add color to salads or aspics. Carnation petals are one of the secret ingredients that has been used to make Chartreuse, a French liqueur, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Chrysanthemums** – Tangy, slightly bitter, ranging in colors from red, white, yellow and orange. They range in taste from faint peppery to mild cauliflower. They should be blanched first and then scatter the petals on a salad. The leaves can also be used to flavor vinegar. Always remove the bitter flower base and use petals only.

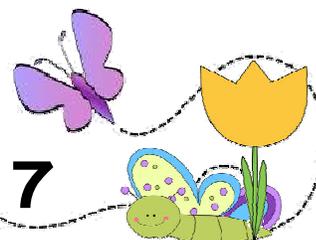


**Cornflower** – also called Bachelors Button. They have a slightly sweet to spicy, clove-like flavor. The bloom is a natural food dye. Most commonly used as a garnish.



**Citrus Blossoms** – orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit, kumquat have highly scented waxy petals, use sparingly. Distilled orange flower water is characteristic of Middle Eastern pastries and beverages. It has a citrus lemony flavor.

**Fuchsia**—Blooms have a slightly acidic flavor. Explosive colors and graceful shape make them ideal as garnishes. The berries are also edible.



Garden Sorrel – The flowers are tart, lemon tasting. Use like a lemon on pizza, as a salad topping, in sauces or over cucumber salads.

Impatiens – The flowers have a sweet flavor. They can be used as a garnish in salads or floated in drinks.



Johnny-Jump-Ups – Lovely yellow, white and purple blooms have a mild wintergreen flavor and can be used in salads, to decorate cakes or served with soft cheese. They are also a great addition to drinks, soups or desserts.



Nasturtiums – Come in varieties ranging from trailing to upright and in brilliant sunset colors with peppery flavors.

Nasturtiums rank among the most common edible flowers. Blossoms have a sweet, spicy flavor similar to watercress. Stuff whole flowers with savory mousse. Leaves add peppery tang to salads. Use entire flowers to garnish platters, salads, open-faced sandwiches and savory appetizers.



Pansy – Has a slightly sweet green or grassy flavor. If you eat only the petals the flavor is extremely mild, but if you eat the whole flower, there is a wintergreen overtone. Use them as garnishes, in fruit salads, green salad, desserts or in soups.



Roses – Flavors depend on type, color and soil conditions. Flavor reminiscent of strawberries and green apples. Sweet, with subtle undertones ranging from fruit to mint to spice. All roses are edible, with the flavor being more pronounced in the darker varieties. In miniature varieties they can be used to garnish ice cream and

desserts. Freeze them in ice cubes and float them in punches. Note: be sure to remove the bitter white portion of the petals.



Violets – Of course, my favorites! Have a sweet, perfumed flavor. The tender leaves and flowers are wonderful in salads. I also use the flowers to beautifully embellish desserts and iced drinks. Freeze them in punches to delight children and adults

alike. They all make pretty adornments for frosted cakes, sorbets, or any other desserts, and of course, they may be crystallized as well. The heart-shaped leaves are edible and tasty when cooked like spinach.

You are familiar with all the herb flowers that are just as tasty as the foliage when used in salads. Add some petals to any dish you were already going to flavor with the herb. Some of the favorites are alliums, chive blossoms, garlic

blossoms, angelica, anise hyssop, basil, bee balm, borage, chervil, chicory, cilantro, coriander, fennel, ginger, lemon verbena, marjoram, mint oregano, safflower, sage, savory, and thyme.

While this is an extensive list in itself there are many books available on the subject of edible flowers as well as websites you may utilize to find other exciting flowers to use as decorations or to eat.

Candied flowers and petals can be used in a variety of imaginative ways as I have said in my article above. Use to decorate cakes large and small – all kinds of sweet things, such as ice cream, sherbet, creams and fruit salads as well as cocktails.

I leave you with a recipe for **Crystallized/Candy Edible Flowers**. Try it for your next fancy dessert!

#### Ingredients:

1 egg white or powdered egg whites  
Superfine granulated sugar (either purchased or made in a blender or food processor – just blend regular sugar until extra-fine)

Thin paint brush

Violets, pansies, Johnny-jump-ups, rose petals, borage, pinks, scented geraniums, etc.

Wire rack covered with waxed paper.

#### Directions:

Carefully clean and completely dry the flowers or petals. Beat the egg white in the small bowl until slightly foamy, if necessary add a few drops of water to make the white easy to spread.

Paint each flower individually with beaten egg white using the small paint brush. When thoroughly coated with egg white, sprinkle with superfine sugar.

Place the coated flowers or petals on waxed paper on a wire rack. Let dry at room temperature (this could take 12 to 36 hours). To test for dryness, check the base of the bloom and the heart of the flower to make sure they have no moisture. Flowers are completely dry when stiff and brittle to the touch.

*NOTE: To hasten drying, you may place the candied flowers in an oven with a pilot light overnight or in an oven set at 150 degrees to 200 degrees F with the door ajar for a few hours.*

Store the flowers in layers, separated by tissue paper, in an airtight container at room temperature until ready to use. Remember, they are fragile.



**See you again...late summer, early fall. Happy Gardening!**

**TALBOT COUNTY GARDEN CLUB**

P.O. Box 1524, Easton, MD 21601

Member of

Garden Club of America

National Garden Clubs, Inc., Central Atlantic Region

The Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, District I